

THE AIM OF SOCIALISM.

A PAPER BY THE REV. JOHN H. OERTER.
IMPORTANCE OF THE SOCIAL QUESTION—HOW
SOCIALISM PRESENTS ITSELF—ASSERTIONS OF
ITS ADHERENTS—THE STATE OF THE FUTURE—
PROPERTY, RELIGION, MARRIAGE.
To the Editor of the Tribune.

SIR: At a meeting of the ministers of the Reformed Church in America, held this morning, the Rev. John H. Oertler read a paper on "Socialism," which was so favorably received that it was "resolved that Mr. Oertler be requested to present his paper to THE TRIBUNE for publication, that the largest circulation may be given to it."

Very truly yours,
WM. B. MERRITT, Secretary.
New-York, May 20, 1878.

THE PAPER.

Among all questions which at present occupy the attention of human society, the Social question is undoubtedly the most urgent and important. It has found its way not only into the very last "beer saloon," but even up to the thrones of the powers that be. The reason for this is found in the fact, which cannot be ignored, that since the origin of the present regulation of society, no question of such stupendous and world-wide importance has ever been made the order of the day. For this movement does not, perchance, contemplate a partial alteration or far-reaching improvement of what exists, but rather the introduction of an entirely new order and formation of the economic, political and religious relations of the present. Socialism aims at a complete reconstruction of society on the ruins of the old. For this reason we may well pay some attention to this intended radical revolution. But in doing so it is of the utmost importance that we should have a clear understanding of the specific aim and design of this tremendous movement before we attempt to criticize its import and bearing upon existing relations. With your permission, I will, therefore, try to sketch in a few marked outlines the intent and purpose of the present Socialism. And here you will allow me to call your attention—first, to the assertions, and second, to the demands which, on the basis of these assertions, Socialists put to society.

Socialism presents itself to us in those organizations which are known by the name of "Social-Democrats," "Socialistic-Labor Party," or as far as they have become international, by the name of the "International Labor Association." In the following pages reference is had exclusively to this form of Socialism. Now in examining their official programmes, the explanations given by their most prominent originators and leaders, and the repeated statements of their daily papers and transient publications, we find that the followers of this scheme strive at the abolishment of all evils, economic and political, by overthrowing and removing altogether the present regulations of the community. The Socialists, therefore, pretend to notice at present a mass of misfortunes and evils which check and destroy the welfare of the people; and they assert that all these destructive and ruinous conditions are but the inevitable consequences of the present method of industry and political arrangements. But we have to enter more into details.

THE SYSTEM OF PRODUCTION.

In the dominion of labor, trade and commerce, free competition sways its sceptre; that is, each individual enjoys the right and privilege to produce, buy and sell as much as he pleases. His liberty in this respect is only checked by the same liberty of those around him. But now the Socialists assert that in the course of time this very system of free competition has enabled one and another to leave the race-course with greater advantages than the rest. A wise and prudent combination of circumstances, which on the field of production must be taken into consideration, and in addition to this what in common life is called luck, left the one at the end of the year in the possession of a greater profit than the rest of the competitors. The former, therefore, at the beginning of another year could enter the commercial arena with still greater advantages, as he had a greater capital at his command. In this way one part of society has continually risen in the scale of financial and productive ability and skill, while the greatest portion has sunk down into poverty, misery and need.

The first effect of this unequal development is the gradual diminution and final supplanting of that middle class, which in former days occupied the position of manufacturer as well as of laborer and consumer, but which now is compelled to join the ranks of daily laborers again, thereby increasing still more the number of working-hands offered, and enabling the capitalist to reduce wages to the lowest standard. Besides this, the invention and introduction of numerous machines, by which manual labor is made superfluous, essentially increase the advantage of capital.

A second consequence of this one-sided system of production, according to Socialistic assertions, is the fact that labor is not paid according to its intrinsic value, but only in proportion to its being offered and demanded. Socialists call this the cruel, iron law of wages. For instance, a workman is employed ten hours a day. During that time he accomplishes a work which secures to the employer, after the deduction of running expenses, a net gain of \$5. Of this sum the laborer receives only \$3, and the rest flows into the pocket of the capitalist. In this case the workman receives in fact, so the Socialists will tell us, only three-fifths of the value of labor furnished, while the other two-fifths are claimed by his employer without having given any equivalent. By way of this arrangement human labor has become an article of merchandise, whose value will always be estimated in proportion to the amount offered or demanded. And not even that. For Lassalle will tell us: "The average wages always remain reduced to the necessary livelihood, as according to custom, it may be requisite for the prolonging of existence and for propagation. This is the point around which the actual hire will always gravitate, without ever rising for a longer time above this point, or falling below it." (Arbeiter Programme). In short, the present system of industry is in every way calculated to fleece the working class, and to deprive it of its very marrow. The consequences of this depressed condition are lasting poverty, misery, and a host of other social and political evils, out of which grow a continuous commotion of the masses, an uprising of the mass of disinherited paupers against the few millionaires, strikes, lock-outs—in short, a social war of the masses against the power and influence of capital in the hands of a few. These are about the rough outlines of the picture, as the Socialists has sketched it, of the present conditions of things. Time, however, does not permit me to adduce the necessary proof from Socialistic publications.

ASSERTED PRINCIPLES OF SOCIALISM.

Now in opposition to this presumed unhappy state of affairs, Socialism places itself on the foundation of the following asserted principles: Men as such, as members of one and the same family, are equal. Hence they must be permitted to obtain the same position as regards economic, social and political standing. This equality, then, necessarily demands that all should not only be able to enjoy, but that they actually should enjoy, the same liberty in the different relations of life. This sublime and noble end will be reached by the conviction, common to all men, that all are brethren. Equality, liberty and fraternity are, therefore, the fundamental maxims and sentences which the Socialists emphasize, and on the ground of which they believe it is fully justified to present the following claims and demands. According to the above representation, private capital in the hands of a few unprincipled men is the very cause of the disparity and glaring contrasts in the social conditions of life. Hence the Socialists demand, above everything else, that all private property should be abolished and be transferred to the community. In the year 1868 the Congress of the International Labor party, in its session in Brussels, issued the declaration that "coal mines, mines in general, soil, canals, highways, telegraph-institutes, machinery, etc., belong to society, i. e., to the laborers, and that such property must be employed and used for their interest."

It (the Congress) started from the supposition that all these things, if private property, afford to the owner the power "to keep all the other members of society in economic and political dependence." In the year 1899 the same Congress, in its session in Basel, asserted: (1) "The community possesses the right to abolish all individual property, and to transform the same into property common." (2) It is in the interest of the community that such a transformation should take place. The Labor party of the United States in their Congress of Union, in Philadelphia in 1876, issued the following: "Whereas, political liberty without economic equality is only an empty phrase, therefore the party agitates for the present only in the domain of economy (economics), and demands that all instruments of labor (soil, machinery, highways, etc.) should be made the property of society, in order to put into the place of mercenary labor, the production of the community, with a fair distribution of the proceeds of labor." The fundamental demand of Socialism, therefore, is the abolishment of all private property as far as it is an instrument of production, for the purpose of making it capital of society. The individual is indeed permitted to possess separate property as the means of life and articles of comfort and entertainment, but he cannot own capital that would enable him to produce or manufacture for his own interest. Hence the charge, so often made, that Socialism intended to divide the existing property into equal parts among the people, is an erroneous one and without proof. The right to such a transmutation of private capital the Socialists derive from the assertion that such a change would be for the interest of mankind, and in this case the individual had to subordinate his own interests to that of the commonwealth. Besides Socialism considers all private property in its present form as theft; that is to say, it asserts that in consequence of the above described method of industry, the employer at the outset takes away from the lawful and just returns of the labor of the employed, and thus appropriates to himself a property which does not belong to him, but in fact to the laborer. For this very reason the Socialists do not hesitate a moment to demand the said transformation of capital, as thereby the individual would obtain his own again. This radical change one part of the Socialists, especially the followers of Lassalle, expect to be brought about by way of enlightening the minds of the people and by way of legislation; while the apparition of revolution is haunting the heads of the chief agitator, Marx, and his followers. In his closing remarks at the session of the International Labor Association in 1872, he used, for example, the following language: "We must acknowledge that in most of the countries of the Continent, force must be the lever by which our revolution is to be brought about. We shall have to appeal at last to force, in order to establish the sovereignty of labor. The revolution must be salutary, and we find a grand example in the Commune of Paris, which fell because a highly revolutionary movement, standing in connection with this powerful uprising of the Proletarians in Paris, did not break out at the same time in all the principal cities—in Berlin, Madrid, etc."

The second demand of the Socialists is, private enterprise being out of the question, that all labor, trade and commerce should be conducted and regulated by the community, and finally by the State. And as this new organization of industry will soon spread over the entire globe, there will be no more clashing of contending interests of the different countries, but a glorious union of all nations for common welfare will be the last but not the least achievement of Socialism. And then? Well, then the long-hoped for millennium of unbounded prosperity and happiness will be ushered in. Now, on the basis of the foregoing principal demand, the Socialists further claim: (1) An equal rendering of work and an equal time for each laborer. In the socialistic State each citizen owes to the community a certain number of hours of work. (2) The workman must have the full return for his labor, because nothing but labor actually rendered creates the value of an article, the Socialists will tell us. Hence the resolution of the International Labor Association, in the year 1868: "Every society founded on democratic principles denounces all previous taking away of the profits by capital, be it in the form of rents, interests, gain, or in any other form or manner. Labor must obtain its full right and remuneration." (3) An equal education for all members of the State. The following sentence from the programme of the Socialistic Labor Party of Germany will confirm this: "The Socialistic Labor Party demands universal and equal education of the people by the State; compulsory education and free education in all the institutions of learning."

For his State of the future the Socialists demand universal, equal and direct suffrage for persons above twenty years of age; direct legislation by the people; defence of war and peace by the people; obligatory defence of the country by the people, instead of standing armies, etc. Now, for this novel organization of an economic-political State of the people, Socialism strives with a frenzy that nothing short of the realization of its projects will satisfy it. Nay, more than that, Socialists feel called upon to attack every other form of government, be it constitutional monarchy or republic. Hence the charge so often raised against the followers of this scheme, of being enemies of their own country and government, is only too well founded. When Germany some years ago was drawn into that bloody conflict with her bitter enemy across the Rhine, government was compelled to keep a vigilant eye on the Social Democrats and their movements, as at home, lest they should cause internal disturbances, while the gallant army was achieving glorious victories abroad. The same opposition to our Government manifests itself in recent Socialistic publications in this country. On the 16th of March, 1878, for example, the *New-York Volks Zeitung* commented with great satisfaction and approval upon the following item from the columns of the *Ohio Volks Zeitung*:

Now there are many who entirely agree with us as far as European conditions of affairs are concerned, but who, as soon as the United States are in question, are stricken with blindness and at once commence to ignore all laws of revolution, which we would lead here in Paris, Berlin and Petersburg, look upon its being unfolded here as a crime. According to their condition the Socialists of this country would lead the revolution here, and they would not only do so, but they would also consider any opposition to it as the giving up of all efforts for liberty. With burning eyes they point out to the true friends of liberty, to the Social Democrats, the Labor party and other names, and to the war of emancipation, etc. They mention the names of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and they say: "We would lead the revolution here, and we would not only do so, but we would also consider any opposition to it as the giving up of all efforts for liberty. 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